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SOME NOTES ON BOOK-BINDING.

“**L**A relieure est un art tout Français,” writes Thoinan.—But is it? The answer depends entirely upon whether you pay due regard to the workmanship put into the actual binding or are wholly satisfied, so the decoration be effective. The layman is not apt to distinguish between “forwarding” and “tooling.” He forgets that a book is a book, to be opened and read, and not simply to be looked at.

When it comes to decoration the French may be ahead of the Anglo-Saxon, though to my taste their tooling often is too involved and frequently something entirely by itself and inappropriate to the contents of the book. In “forwarding,” whatever may be the opinion of the layman, every expert knows that the English and American binders are more forthright than the French, whose books are apt to be weak in the binding and so stiff in the back (to enable them to bear the overdose of gilding) that they open with difficulty and in time break.

France regards the bound book as a work of art—on the outside. Some French toolers even have their offices entirely separate from the binderies and the work is not done in harmony as between binder and decorator. For to the tooler a book is something to look at rather than to use. What may be called the facility of the book is disregarded, while the

English and American binder proceeds upon the theory that the book primarily is intended to be read and he and the tooler work in harmony to this end.

To me good work on the actual binding of the book is more than half the battle. After that there is nothing for the outside so fine as dignified simplicity. It surpasses the most complex kind of tooling and you never weary of it as you do of the latter. The Jansenists appreciated this. The outsides of their books are extremely simple. They put all their gilding—and sometimes a little too much of it—on the doublure. Even in the days of Grolier, that prince of bibliophiles, whose name is supposed to stand for everything beautiful connected with a book, and through whom the Italian art of bookbinding reached France, the Italians still cultivated a dignity of beauty and grace which surpassed the more ornate work of the French. Personally I should be satisfied with a little more decoration than the Jansenists put on the cover, and considerably less than they employ on the doublure. Mr. Fletcher Battershall in his charming volume, "Bookbinding for Bibliophiles," instances as an example of the beautiful Italianate binding which persisted even in Grolier's days, the Commentaries of Caesar, printed by Giunta and now in the British Museum. "It has" he says, "beauty, dignity, and a charm untiring, which are not found so unalloyed in the more gorgeous and flowing triumphs of the great French craftsmen. The Italian of the Renaissance accomplished beauty with few and rigid elements."

One of the leading American binders showed me a book

which he had bound Jansen style. It cost eight dollars, yet, as he said, it was just as fine as if it had cost two hundred dollars. I wish we might reach a point when the binder could be expected to charge for taste instead of for gilt and time—taste to be shown in guiding the customer in the choice of color for the leather to be used. This point struck me in looking at a volume of Christina Rossetti's poems in a New York bindery conducted by a woman. There was little tooling and what there was of it was in lines, but these lines framed an exquisite surface of old-rose colored leather, beautiful in itself and most appropriate to the book. Here, as with the Jansenist binding of my other friend, was a cover that seemed to have developed from the book itself. That after all is the real triumph of the binder and is one reason why an old book in a binding of its own time always is one of the bibliophile's greatest treasures.

Octave Uzanne has published a book, "*La Relieuse Moderne, Artistique et Fantaisiste*," in which he illustrates the work of over seventy contemporary French craftsmen. It is extraordinary how the old historic patterns stand out from the rest. I saw a volume of Poe, "*The Gold Bug*," bound by one of the masters of French binding. The gold bug was crawling over the cover. It was obvious realism—and ridiculous. Decoration, that develops from the book itself should be symbolic, not realistic, otherwise the illustrations printed on the covers of our best sellers would be triumphs of bookbinding, whereas they reduce it to its lowest level.

Personally I adhere to simple design and exercise of taste

in the choice of color—and the range of color in leather is far greater than generally supposed—for the appropriate effect in binding a book. What more delightfully subtle than to harmonize the psychology of color on the outside with the psychology of mind on the inside of a book? I was delighted to be told by my Jansenist friend that a binder who loves his craft finds more satisfaction in executing an appropriate binding that costs half the price of a more expensive but inappropriate one. He himself has done expensive work and kept it appropriate, for example a large altar Bible which he bound in ecclesiastically emblematic design, although this departure from the beaten path necessitated the cutting of new tools. It is he who bound the great catalogue of the Heber R. Bishop collection of jades in a design wholly suggestive of jade effects.

The woman who bound the Rosetti has produced a French etui in pure XVII century interlacing. It holds Victor Hugo's "Bug-Jargal." Around the book is a chemise of the same silk as the doublure, and the binding of the book is the same as the etui. The whole is a bijou. Then there is a copy of Michel Angelo's sonnets. The cover is inlaid with russet, Italian green, Italian blue; and there are golds and whites. Inside is Italian vellum. The work suggests the Padeloup genre. In the same bindery are other artistic creations.

But to all of them I prefer the Rosetti, because of its simplicity and because it suggested to me that after all the mere matter of choice of color—delicate or pronounced—can determine whether the result is a triumph of bookbinding or a failure.



THE "MONNIER MOSAIC"

in the second Hoe sale—an example of
bookbinding from a master of the craft